



Constitutional Status of Christian Minority in Pakistan: The Way Forward

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Abstract

Majority of Pakistani population is Muslim by religion. However, there are followers of other religions integrated into Pakistani society like Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Parsi, Bihai, Buddhist and so on. Christians form 1.6 % of total population in Pakistan which is the second largest minority by religion in Pakistan. In the last decade, there have been multiple violent attacks against Christians on multiple pretexts. There has always been an outcry that minorities are being mistreated and discriminated. But there is a need to probe into the reasons, whether they are governmental, social or personal. A close analysis of these violent attacks on Christians reveals that these attacks are usually either led by post 9/11 Islamists who came in Pakistan or by mobs incited on false blasphemy accusations on personal and economic benefits. This paper is an attempt to explore the responsible agencies, institutes and attitudes involved in this mistreatment of Christians. This paper is an attempt to explore some major attacks on Christian community in Pakistan, their reasons, consequences and ramifications for future. Moreover, the paper recommends some individual and collective acts which will help to build Pakistan as a more pluralistic, tolerant and peaceful society overall.

Key words: Minority, mob attacks, bomb blasts, Christian, Pakistan

Introduction:

The debate on the issue of minorities has become a crucial topic of modern social set up in a democratic society. There is quite pertaining statement by African Progress Panel that, "Citizens are the owners of society. The government is made by the people. People are you and me simply." (www.africanprogresspanel.org). Beyond the identities of color, creed and dogmas, there is distinct legal and constitutional identity reserved for each citizen. This very identity offers a complete set of rights and duties ascribed by the constitution and protected by the courts. Politically speaking, role of citizens is crucial in bringing social change and development. In democracies, role of citizens is instrumental in political process and decision making. This very connection makes the relationship between government and the citizens more delicate and meaningful, especially in case of minorities.

The legal and constitutional acceptance of Universal Declaration of Human Rights throughout the globe has given issue of Human Rights a new dimension. In case of minorities, especially in case of ideological states with overwhelming majority of one religion, the issue of rights, responsibilities and protection has become a serious point of concern. Pakistan is an ideological state which was created in the name of Islam. Although the official state religion is Islam, Pakistan still owns minorities as a part of the country. The 1/3 white colour in Pakistani flag



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stands for the minorities as compared to the rest of the green colour which signifies the religion Islam. If Pakistan is created in the name of Islam, it does not mean that the other religions cannot live here. The religion Islam has a long history of peacefully co-existing with the other religions. Some prominent examples of Muslim peaceful alliances and co-existence are Muslim community in Madinah where Muslims co-existed with both Christians and Jews, Salahuddin Ayubi's kindness and protection of Christian community and worshipping places after his conquest of Jerusalem in 12th century AD and peaceful coexistence of Hindus, Muslims and Christians and many other religions in pre-partition India for almost 200 years. Thus, Muslims have been living in peaceful co-existence with other religion's followers since so many centuries.

The rights of minorities at the times of partition

Located in the midst of so many uncertainties and fears, Pakistan remains unswervingly dedicated to her ideals of peace and democracy. There is a quality of positive definiteness attached to the declarations and intentions of Pakistan, which gives a sense of direction and light to the beholder of the murky scene of national and international politics (Welty, 1962, p. 92).

It is evident from the historical paradigm of Pakistani state that Quaid e Azam envisioned Pakistan as a tolerant and pluralistic state. He announced to all Pakistanis, "...you are free to go to your mosque or to any place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed... that has nothing to do with the business of the state" (11 August, 1947). Later on in March 1949 constitution, the rights of religious minorities were reiterated. It proclaims: "...persons belonging to ... minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language" (International covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966). In the constitution of 1973, minorities were entitled to the "freedom of trade, business or profession, freedom of speech, right to information, freedom to profess religion and to manage religious institutions, safeguard against taxation for purposes of any particular religion, protection of educational institutions in respect of religion, provision as to property, protection of property rights, equality of citizens, right to education, non-discrimination in respect of access to public places, safeguard against discrimination in services, preservation of language, script and culture" (Ahmed, 2010).

Minority Rights under 1973 Constitution:

The constitution of 1973 is the sacred document that pronounces the entire features of political system of Pakistan. Here is an analysis of the Articles provide assurance for the fundamental safeguards to the rights of minorities in Pakistan.

1. Article 20 is crucial to the study in this regard. It provides religious freedom to the minorities. Freedom means that there should be no restriction for any minority in worshipping, performing their religious activities according to their rituals and a freedom to preach and religiously educate their community.
2. They have right to establish their religious institutions like temples, Gurukuls, Path-Shalaas, Aashrams and churches etc.



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3. Article 21 provides safeguards against the taxation that is about to be used for the benefit of any other religion.
4. Article 22 of the Constitution provides for the safeguard to the religious educational institutions. Whatever educational institutions are operating should be maintained by the same community. No person, belonging to any other community should be allowed to take part in the religious activities of those institutions.
5. In case of safeguards against discrimination in jobs and representation, Article 27 provides that there is complete protection to all communities without any discrimination. No community would be refused on the grounds of color, cast, dogmas and creeds. Here is that constitutional safeguard that is particular with the political rights of a community.
6. Article 36 resolves to provide legitimate protection to the rights and interests of minorities as far as their political representation; social and economic justice is concerned. Protection of minorities in the local and general elections also comes in the sphere of this Article.

While explaining the issue of minorities in Pakistan under the constitution Dr Babar Awan, the former Federal Minister of Law (PPP), stated according to the article 36, “The State shall safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities, including their due representation in the Federal and Provincial services” (Awan, 2014). Moreover, Minority representation in the Parliament and Provincial Assemblies is also mandatory. There is an allocation of 10 reserved seats in the National Assembly for the minorities of Pakistan. Moreover, In the provincial assemblies, there are 8 minority seats in Punjab, 9 in Sindh, 3 in KPK and 3 in Balochistan respectively.

Christian Community in Pakistan

The majority of Pakistani population is Muslim. However, after Hindus, Christians are the second-largest minority group in Pakistan which is composed of about 1.6% of the total population. “Among all the minorities, the Christians have made a tremendous contribution to our national development”. They have been running some of the best educational and health care organizations in the country. Moreover, they are also working as teachers and playing a fundamental function in the accomplishment and welfare of Pakistani society (Majid, 2014, 8).

The major Christian settlements are present in the southern metropolis of Karachi, in some villages of Punjab, Lahore and Faisalabad, KPK, especially in Peshawar. It is believed that the greater part of Christians living in Pakistan hail from low-caste Hindus who preferred to convert under the British colonization in order to break away from the curse of caste system. Many of them worked as labour in garrison towns. “Every cantonment city has an area known as Lal Kurti, traditionally the area where Christians reside. But Christian communities remain in the poorest sector of society doing menial jobs” (BBC). In some places of Pakistan, entire villages of Christian work as “laborers and farmhands”. Some sections of educated Christian community are well off who migrated from Goa and are established their homelands in Karachi. Some of them have left Pakistan because of the prevailing “climate of intolerance” and settling down in Canada and Australia. Experts believe that pre-partition Pakistan was by far more diverse place and



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today's Pakistan is becoming increasingly intolerant because of many collective and individual selfish interests (BBC, 2016).

Pakistan is also accused of sabotaging employment opportunities of Christians. But Preston (1999) reports some names of Christian senior judges, civil servants and ambassadors. He further quotes a Pakistani bishop, "...many of the "competitive" Christians had immigrated to the US., Canada and Australia, leaving in Pakistan less capable Christians who charge discrimination to rationalize their lack of talent. "Show me a capable Christian and I'll hire him," he said" (Preston 842).

Foreign aid

There are many Western Christian foreign aid workers in Pakistan. These volunteers from North America and Australia assist Southern Baptist, independent Presbyterian and nondenominational congregations. Additionally, they support the Christian faith through literature circulation, education clinics and home Bible learning programs. Many social services are given to Christian children through foreign aid ranging from education to food programs (Preston, 1999). The Christian community is facing multiple challenges in Pakistan like "the lack of political activity", isolation of Christian neighborhoods from mainstream Muslim society and lack of technological know-how (Edwin, The Nation, 2017).

Christian Community's Situation at Present

In Pakistan, most of the Muslims and Christians co-exist peacefully. However, there are some outbursts of acrimony. There are some cases of social discrimination and sometimes mob violence on the pretexts of accusations of blasphemy. Moreover, some vested interested groups also have proclivity to target the Christian community every now and then.

There are extensive rights of Christians mentioned in the constitutions of Pakistan. Minorities have also been given the representation quota in the national and provincial assemblies and even in Senate. However, Khel points out the loophole in the election system, "the non-Muslim members in the various representative bodies are the nominees of Muslims rather than the representatives of the non-Muslim communities in Pakistan" (Khel, 1999, 53). The minorities are not satisfied with the prevailing electoral system in Pakistan. They are of the view that they have to face discrimination everywhere in society. All these circumstances make them feel that if they were second class citizens of Pakistan.

Discrimination against Christians

The Christians are playing their role in the political system but the conditions are not as favorable for them as for the Muslims. They are facing a number of serious issues which are affecting their performance in nation building programs.

Social Discrimination

The Christians have been residing in the areas included in Pakistan for the last many hundred years in complete peace and harmony with other communities but there are some serious issues and problems with respect to their identity and participation in social sphere of life. Like other minorities they are also facing some problems in day to day life. According to Mr. Nazir S. Bhatti, Chief Editor of the Daily Pakistan Christian Post, in daily routine life they



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are being maltreated and discriminated which is a great hindrance in the way their prosperity as well as progress of the country.

Pakistan is an Islamic country and Islam gives everyone equal status in society but most of the Christian leaders are of the view that in Pakistan the Christians are being treated as second class citizens. In the survey conducted during this research majority of the Christians belonging to lower class expressed their views that they are being treated as second class citizens in Pakistan. They are not given their due status in society. They are not allowed to dine at public places and restaurants. Even in schools, colleges, or public places they are discriminated as if they are untouchable. Colonel Chaudary, a Christian, at present residing in Lahore, served in the Pakistan Army for thirty years. He recalls that once there were a few Muslim laborers employed in his house, while he was still in the Army, working on some structural renovation. When they were offered food by the Colonel's cook, they all refused to eat it because of the impurity associated with eating at a Christian's house (Khalid, 2013).

Khalid (2013) also writes about Dr. Yousaf John, a politician and a social worker, based in Lahore. When he was in school, unfortunately there was only one tap and all the teachers and students drank water from that tap. He was instructed not to put his mouth to the only tap in the school to drink water, as was the practice, but instead use his hands to drink the water. It was only because of their thinking that the water would become impure if a Christian touched tap with his mouth. Mr. John, could not object as he was the only Christian student in the school. Had he object to it, the Muslim students would have beaten him, he recalls.

Marylou Andrew in his column in 'The Daily Dawn' shares his experiences as a member of Christian community. He writes, "I am the lucky one that I have had all the opportunities while living in Pakistan. I went to the educational institutions where 98% of the students were Muslims but my religious beliefs were never challenged. I was not forced to study Islamiyat. In college or university I was never treated differently and into a job market employers did not discriminate against me on the basis of my faith." But there are hundreds of stories, he recalls, which can be told e.g. he tells the readers, "My mother was a bank employee. She told me about how Muslim cleaners at the bank refused to clean the bathrooms or sweep the floors, because they believed that only Christians or Hindus were suited for that job. Their supervisor was also agreed with them so the Muslim cleaners did only the dusting while the non-Muslims were asked to do the 'dirty' work.

That is why the Christians are disappointed and this disappointment can be seen in this statement of 76 years old Iqbal Maseh, "Yesterday I was a sweeper, today my sons are sweepers and tomorrow my grandsons will do the same job. Nothing changes, our people will live and die sweeping (newsline, 2011). Discriminated against the Christian sweepers can be seen not only by the Muslims but their fellow Christian also who are working in other departments. During the survey, Faisal Maseh, a sweeper in Lahore told, "People do not like to speak, sit or dine with us. They don't let us mix with them. Even some of our Christians brethren hate us and look down upon us". The result of such discrimination is that Christian sweepers tend to reside collectively away from the other people who don't like to intermingle with them. It is better to live with our



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own people and stick to them. “Why would we want to live with the people who don’t respect us?”, told Aslam Maseh, a sweeper of Government Shalimar College, Lahore.

Niamat Maseh, a sweeper in Government Shalimar College, told that the college staff is very co-operative with us. On the eve of Christmas or Easter they help with money. Even on the eve of Eid-ul-fitr and Eid-ul-Azha we receive gifts from college staff. They are very loving to us. But they don’t let us sit with them or dine with them. If tea is offered to us we are asked to bring our own cups for tea. If food is offered to us we have to take it in our separate plates. What is this if not discrimination?

Although 5% quota has been given to minorities in the government jobs according to the law but they are forced to do jobs which are rejected by the Muslims. They are given jobs in low grades or the jobs which are rejected by the Muslims..For examples in Lahore where the population is more than one million and Christian are mostly offered jobs of cleaning toilets, houses, street lanes and roads. They carry human waste and garbage from the houses and markets to garbage depots. The Christian women work inside the houses to clean the houses, lawns, toilets etc. but they are not allowed to enter into the kitchen and touch the eatable there. They can’t even sit on the furniture where the Muslims have to sit. They are treated inhumanely and socially are placed in the lowest community (Shamsi, 2011).

Sometimes this social discrimination turns into violence and violent mob attacks have been witnessed time and again. Since 2012, the persecution of minorities, in Pakistan, has picked up the pace. According to the report around 40 attacks were carried upon Christian community. Moreover sexual assault cases, forced conversions and kidnapping often remain unreported and unchecked by government institutes (Edwin, The Nation, 2016). Major causes of it are listed below:-

Postcolonial Experience

Sometimes it seems that Christians are associated with the colonizers because they share religion with them. In pre-partition India, mostly, untouchables converted to Christianity as has been mentioned earlier with evidence. The impact of Hindu caste system is, unfortunately, too strongly branded on the post partition Pakistanis’ psyches. Consequently, Christians are still considered as untouchables and mostly hired for the menial jobs like toilet cleaning and labour work.

The Vengeance against West and Christians

The Christians share the religion with the overwhelmingly Christian anti-Islam West.

Resultantly, they face the ire of Pakistani Muslim community more than any other community whenever anything anti-Islamic happens in the world by Christians living anywhere in the world.

Lack of Support to Christian Community

There are not enough chances, protection and opportunities for the Christian minority in Pakistan. They usually remain low-key for the fears of their lives, property and worshipping places. There are not enough programs by the government to accommodate the marginalized Christian community



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Meme Transmission of Primal Values

“In recent times, backed by the formidable power of the state, Hindu India and Islamic Pakistan have vigorously injected religion into both politics and society. The result is their rapid re-tribalisation through ‘meme transmission’ of primal values” (Hoodbhoy, The Dawn, 2017).

He further elaborated that the concept of meme transmission was propounded by Richard Dawkins and a meme means a ‘piece of thought’ which can transfer from person to person by ersatz. “Like computer viruses, memes can jump from mind to mind”. Consequently, memes which propagate the philosophy of superior religious or cultural notions have been ‘cut-and-pasted’ into the mental framework of contemporary youth. Consequently, more than ever before, today’s youth uncritically accepts the inherent morality of their particular group, engages in self-censorship, rationalizes the group’s decisions, and engages in moral policing. In conclusion, “Group think and deadly memes” cause the mob lynching.

Lack of Respect and Tolerance for the Minorities

Another reason behind the mistreatment of Christian community is the prevailing lack of respect for the minorities. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), “pervasive intolerance” against minorities has been ‘widely tolerated’ in Pakistan for a while now. The director of Commission, I.A. Rehman (2013), believes that the credit of this violence and lack of respect for minorities goes to “the virus of intolerance” that “has infested the Pakistani people’s minds”. It seems that masses have become intolerant to diversity, pluralism, difference of belief system and values.

Poverty

Pakistan is a developing country. The developing countries are more prone to injustice and violence because of economic disputes. Four out of 10 Pakistanis are living in acute poverty (Rana, *The Express Tribune*, 2016) which means 40 % people of Pakistan are poor. Moreover, 29.5 % of Pakistanis are living below the national poverty line (Asian Development Bank, 2017). Most of the blasphemy accusations happen because of personal vendettas against minorities on economic pretexts.

Recommendations

1. Social Reforms

In order to integrate Christian community into social, political and national fabric, it is crucial to implement some social reforms programs. In these programs, mass awareness programs for the common people should be transmitted through printed and electronic and print media. The masses, especially youth of Pakistan is needed to be trained to respect the minorities.

2. Positive Legislative

Whether the state follows Sharia law or any other law, it is imperative to give protection to religious minorities. Some laws and severe punishments should be inculcated into the legislative for the crimes against minorities. There must be special punishments for the false accusations.



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3. Mob-attack cases need serious consideration

Moreover, the cases of mob attacks are needed to be dealt more seriously by the Police and other law and order organizations. The only reason behind the occurrences of mob lynching is the prevailing impunity and lack of the power of law.

4. Curtailing the extremism

Extremism is harmful in every walk of life. It can be devastating for the existence and peace of any country which does not work on it. There is a dire need to curtail religious extremism which motivates most of the hate crimes against Christians.

5. Interfaith Studies

For the future generation preparation, more relevant steps should be taken. More interfaith study programs and courses should be offered at college and university level which can increase the level of respect for each other's religion and beliefs.

6. Spread the True Spirit of Islamic Rights for Minorities

Being a Muslim state does not at all allow anyone to take law in hands and torch anyone on doubt. Islam believes in protecting the life, property and honour of non-Muslims. Every minority should be given equal rights to participate in the economic, social and intellectual development of Pakistan; irrespective of their cast, colour, creed and religion. People from all minorities should be treated as equal citizens of state. Only then, Pakistan can emerge as a truly pluralistic Islamic welfare state.

7. Islam, Research and Rule of Law

Moreover, Islam inculcates the spirit of research. If a report against a minority reaches to a common man, that person should be wise enough to investigate the alleged crime before jumping into the mob-lynch mania. This is the responsibility of intelligentsia, media, government and NGOs to spread this kind of awareness. Even if the person is proved guilty no one should give this right to any citizen to take away the life of any other citizen. Judicial system should be foolproof enough to take care of such cases transparently and neutrally.

8. The Role of Christian Community

Christian community should be more active and government should provide them platforms for the uplifting of their own community. Christian community should also make appropriate use of their available political, intellectual, social, technological and human resources to train their community.

9. Christian Leadership

The Christian leaders should be chosen carefully who prove themselves to be true representatives of their community. These leaders should be able to take initiative for the betterment of their community and execute those plans. Moreover, Christian families, institutions, clergymen and leaders must concentrate on the human resource development of their community. Furthermore, the Christian community should be trained to survive according to the requirements of 21st century careers. They should be provided technological trainings.



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10. Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations

Minority activists, Government of Pakistan and NGOs can perform a significant part in raising awareness about social, political and religious rights of Christians in Pakistan. Furthermore, programs like workshops, lecture and seminars for the awareness and peaceful co-existence of the Muslims and Christians should be organized. These programs should be organized at especially those places where Christians and Muslims live together in communities.

Conclusion

The chapter containing basic human rights and the description of the rights of minorities is such character of the Constitution of 1973 that gives this state a true democratic character. The definition of the term 'citizen' and description of rights and responsibilities enshrines the respect and dignity of the citizens. The constitution of Pakistan ensures political liberties of all citizens equally. No political system is aloof from cultural effects. When rules are regulations are operated in a political culture, there emerges a diverse situation. Many a times the issues of minorities bring up such a situation that poses some serious challenge both for the system and society.

Christian minority, like all other minorities in Pakistan, has been given rights by Pakistani constitution. Majority of Pakistani citizens wants to see the country as a pluralistic state. However, Christian community has been facing social discrimination and a wave of violence for the last few years. The sudden rise in the crimes against minorities needs to be noticed, followed up and the perpetrators have to be punished. Christian community should be given incentives and more chances to participate in the nation-building process. Christian community and its leaders should also take initiative to uplift their fellow Christian brotherhood. In short, numerous social, political, economic and academic initiatives can be taken to develop the circumstances of Christian community in Pakistan. Majority of these initiatives are not very expensive. However, they merely necessitate strong will and determination.



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